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Obesity Research at ERS

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Food Assistance & Nutrition
Research Program

*Economic Research for a Healthy,
Well-Nourished America*

Obesity Research at ERS

ERS conducts behavioral research related to obesity, focusing on the role of food and nutrition assistance programs, economic factors contributing to obesity, economic costs of obesity, aspects of behavioral nutrition, and the role of information. ERS research is designed to meet the critical information needs of Congress, program managers, policy officials, the research community, and the public at large.

ERS also funds data collection initiatives as means of improving the availability of data and facilitating research with the objective of advancing the understanding of issues related to obesity.

Recent Obesity-Related Research Reports from ERS

The Economics of Obesity: A Report on the Workshop Held at USDA's Economic Research Service (E-FAN-04-004)

This report is a summary of the papers and discussions from April 2003 workshop. Jointly hosted by ERS and the University of Chicago's Irving B. Harris Graduate School of Public Policy Studies and the George J. Stigler Center for the Study of the Economy and the State, the workshop's purpose was to provide an overview of leading health economics research on the causes and consequences of rising obesity in the United States and discuss policy implications and future directions for obesity research.

Nutrition and Health Characteristics of Low-Income Populations: Body Weight Status (AIB-796-3)

The Nutrition and Health Characteristics of Low-Income Populations study examined several measures of body weight status for children and adults using 1988-94 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) data. The measures provide a baseline to monitor the weight status of Americans, focusing on the low-income population.

Contributions of Nonalcoholic Beverages to the U.S. Diet (ERR-1)

The caloric contribution of beverages to the diet may be contributing to the obesity problem in the U.S. This report analyzes consumer demand and nutritional issues associated with nonalcoholic beverages purchased for at-home use by looking at demographic variables such as household size, household income, education level, and region. The beverages include milk, carbonated soft drinks, bottled water, fruit juices, fruit drinks, coffee, tea, and isotonics (sports drinks).

Innovative WIC Practices: Profiles of 20 Programs (E-FAN-04-007)

This study examines innovative practices at 20 State or local WIC agencies, focusing on breastfeeding promotion and support (including peer counseling and programs for high-risk groups), nutrition and health education (including obesity prevention, preventive health care, and staff training), and service delivery (such as home and workplace visits). For each program, the report discusses the source of the innovation, key challenges, implementation lessons learned, evidence of its success, and the feasibility of replicating the practice.

Food Assistance Research Brief—Childhood Obesity and the Role of USDA (FANRR-34)

Although most of USDA's child nutrition programs were established in response to documented problems of underconsumption and undernutrition among the low-income population, they now have the potential to reduce the prevalence of childhood obesity. This brief examines the how USDA food assistance and nutrition programs can be used to help further that goal.

ERS Obesity Research Publications Elsewhere

“Body Mass Index in Elementary School Children, Metropolitan Area Food Prices and Food Outlet Density,” R. Sturm and A. Datar. *Public Health*, December 2005, 119 (12):1059-68.

“The Effect of Breast-Feeding With and Without Concurrent Formula Feeding on the Risk of Obesity at 4 Years of Age,” D.L. Bogen, B.H. Hanusa, and R.C. Whitaker. *Obesity Research*, Vol. 12, No. 9, September 2004.



“Predicting Preschooler Obesity at Birth: The Role of Maternal Obesity in Early Pregnancy” R. Whitaker. *Pediatrics*, Vol. 114, No. 1, July 2004.

“Continuous and Robust Measures of the Overweight Epidemic: 1971-2000,” Dean Jolliffe. *Demography*, May 2004, 41(2): 303-314.

“Sugar-Added Beverages and Adolescent Weight Change,” C. Berkey, H. Rockett, A. Field, M. Gillman, G. Colditz. *Obesity Research*, May 2004, 12 (5): 778-788.

“The Extent of Overweight Among US Children and Adolescents from 1971-2000,” Dean Jolliffe. *International Journal of Obesity*, Jan. 2004, 28(1): 4-9.

Data Development

Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Birth Cohort 2000 (ECLS-B) and Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K)

are sponsored by the National Center for Educational Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. FANRP funds have been used to support food security modules, measures of weight and height, and questions on breastfeeding, eating behavior, and food assistance program participation.

The American Time Use Survey (ATUS)

is a longitudinal survey sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics that collects information on how Americans spend their time, including where they are and whom they are with during activities. FANRP is developing a module of questions for the ATUS that will enhance understanding of eating patterns; of obesity and time use patterns; and of the time use constraints faced by food assistance recipients.

National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES)

is an ongoing survey series sponsored in part by FANRP funding. NHANES assesses the health and nutritional status of the population and monitors changes over time. A dietary 24-hour recall and a 1-month food frequency survey are used to obtain dietary data. The data set variables include individuals’ characteristics and food assistance program participation. Outcome variables of interest include numerous nutritional and health indicators, such as food and nutrient intake, dietary practices, body measurements, hematological tests, including iron status, biochemical analyses of whole blood and serum, and cognitive and physical functioning.

Ongoing Obesity-Related Research at ERS

Future Costs of Childhood Obesity: Estimates and Implications

Development of novel probabilistic models for estimating long-term direct costs (health care) and indirect costs (missed school, missed work, disability) related to youths being overweight. The project will analyze data from the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS) for 2000-02 for children aged 10-18, supplemented with data from the MEPS-linked National Health Interview Survey, the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth.

An Examination of the Effects of Food Stamps on Obesity

An examination of the causal relationship between Food Stamp Program participation and the prevalence of obesity, applying advanced econometric techniques to data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth.

Food Security, Obesity, and Mental Health in Mothers and Preschool Children

An examination of the relationships among household food security, the obesity status of mothers and their preschool children, and the mental health of mothers and the prevalence of children's behavioral issues, using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study.

Parental Time, Role Strains, Coping, and Children's Diet and Nutrition

A study of the effects of how parental time use, time constraints, work demands, role strains, and coping mechanisms affect children's diets and obesity risk.

The Ecological Predictors and Developmental Outcomes of Persistent Childhood Obesity

An identification of school, family, parent, and child predictors of persistent childhood obesity and an assessment of the health, social, emotional, and academic outcomes of persistent childhood obesity.

Factors Affecting Childhood Obesity Among Low-Income Households

Using data from USDA's 1994-96 Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals and a statistical technique to correct for selectivity bias, research is designed to ascertain if children from low-income households that participated in food assistance programs are at a greater risk of becoming obese than are their counterparts.

The Economic Research Service (ERS) is the main source of economic information and research from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The mission of ERS is to inform and enhance public and private decisionmaking on economic and policy issues related to agriculture, food, natural resources, and rural development.

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